



WHY A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

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WHY IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

WHY WOULD THE WOMEN IN "MY CHURCH" PARTICIPATE?

Purpose Statement

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to

- ~ grow in faith,
- ~ affirm our gifts,
- ~ support one another in our callings,
- ~ engage in ministry and action, and
- ~ promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.

Why Women of the ELCA? ~ Pastor Doris Sparks

The truth is if you have not asked those questions you have been asked them or someone you know is thinking them. You might find it interesting that a "clergy woman" is writing an article about the importance of women meeting together but I want to tell my story and in doing that those questions will be answered.

I went to seminary in 2000. I was 50 at the time. My journey to that day and ordination was facilitated by many women who went to the "Women's Missionary Society" with their mothers. In the 1970s I was one of the "young women" who are still longed for in women's groups throughout the ELCA. They nurtured me, mentored me and helped me through raising three children, moving, depression and all of life's struggles. I never had a sister, but I have many "sisters in Christ."

There are not many things in the church or a women's organization that I have not done (and that is before seminary). There were council meetings, newsletters, janitorial duties, visiting the sick, Bible Studies, kitchen duties, Sunday School and VBS classes. However, true heart-to-heart sharing usually occurred only in small groups of women.

Our grandmothers lived near or with their families. They had built in help and support for the daily challenges of life from birthing to the first gray hair. My children live in three different states and my daughter is six hours away. This is the norm, not the exception. Add to that the women who grew up in dysfunctional families (didn't we all!) who never had loving sup-

port and you have our status today, women who lack the basic support of other women that was received for millennia at the well, the marketplace or in the kitchen working together. Truthfully, you can be in meetings with men for days and know nothing about them, but spend 2 hours with a group of women and you know all about babies being born and all sorts of intimate details. (You are smiling. Aren't you?) In our sophistication, we have become isolated. Women of the ELCA is a "community of women."

This level of trust and sharing does not occur in the dog eat dog mentality of corporate America when the challenges of life are seen as weaknesses rather than the normal rhythm of life. Sharing outside the faith community gets answers from "pop" psychology or invitations to party or, in the worst case, gossip against you. Women have always banded together to do things. That is how we got the vote and how many things get done in the fight for any cause from breast cancer to "Mothers Against Drunk Drivers." Women don't just talk about things, we act. The Mission of the Women of the ELCA is: *"To mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ."*

Rather than growing closer together in the 21st century, we are more isolated than ever before. Women need connections to others both older and younger in order to pass on and receive shared wisdom, life stories and their faith walk in order to be strong vibrant women. The Purpose Statement spells out what we are about

(see inset for wording).

Where else do we hold up such lofty goals for our young women, our working women or our seniors? At every age, we should be seeking just those things that are the reason for this organization. Every woman is "called to discipleship in Jesus Christ." Most women lament that they don't have enough time for everything but this organization provides help for the challenges of life and support on our journey. If the women of your congregation can do all that is in the Purpose Statement without sharing with others in the larger community of women, then they have let the rest of us down by not sharing. If they can't, then come and share with others the part you do well so that we might all be better disciples. All the women of the Evangelical Church of America need to participate collectively in the organization that clearly defines who they are and what they are about.

I am passionate about this organization because I know many women who have had their gifts affirmed there and gone on to be pastors, associates in ministry (AIM), business women, mothers, and grandmothers who were strong in their faith, encouraged others and shared the Gospel with others. There is a place for you, your friend, your neighbor, your daughter and your mother. The greatest invitation ever offered was "come and see." I invite you to "come and see" what the Women of the ELCA is all about!